Social Wars: Conflicts of Belonging and Identity Transformation

John Severini

This paper explores the intersection of identity and legality when categorizing wars, separating out four different types: civil, sectarian, foreign, and social. The final type, social wars, captures conflicts between legally independent states with overlapping demographic identities. The main claim of this paper is that social wars primarily occur during periods of identity convergence and divergence. The first is more likely to occur when a rising power is forcibly checked by allies whose identities it is subsuming; the latter is more likely to occur when a falling power lashes out at former constituents whose collective identities are beginning to break away. The Russo-Ukrainian War falls within the falling power experience, but a potential conflict over Taiwan could occur in a similar fashion. Finally, social wars are likely to become more common in the future of a globalizing world experiencing sociocultural convergence.

Since the end of the Second World War and the advent of the "Long Peace," civil wars have been by far the most common type of armed conflict in the world.[1] This became especially salient for political science after the Cold War, as the "unipolar moment" meant that major foreign conflicts between great powers seemed especially unlikely – as a result, scholarship on

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[1] John Lewis Gaddis, "The Long Peace: Elements of Stability in the Postwar International System," *International Security* 10, no. 4 (1986): 99–142, https://doi.org/10.2307/2538951; Scott Gates et al., "Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946–2014" (Oslo, Norway: Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), January 2016), https://www.prio.org/publications/8937; With Louise Bosetti et al., "Civil War Trends and the Changing Nature of Armed Conflict," *United Nations University Centre for Policy Research*, March 2017.

civil wars began to surge.[2] International relations saw work that focused on the complex role that civil conflict played in the international sphere, but largely continued to maintain a binary distinction separating wars that occurred between states and wars that occurred within them. Civil conflicts could have transnational dimensions, but they were still seen as fundamentally different from wars between states.[3] Although empirical findings from one side of the binary were frequently integrated into understandings about the other, there broadly remained a categorical gulf in the scholarship between the two types of conflict.[4]

Recently, however, there has been a surge in work (particularly, in security studies) focused on the concern that great power competition is coming back to the forefront of global politics, bringing with it the fear of interstate war between the most economically and militarily preponderant states.[5] Special concern is often given to Russia and China, with both frequently characterized as revisionist and revanchist powers interested in reorganizing the current international order to better suit their interests.[6] Considering the current Russo-Ukrainian War in

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[2] Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs*, 1992 1990; Barry R. Posen, "Civil Wars & the Structure of World Power," *Daedalus* 146, no. 4 (October 1, 2017): 167–79, https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00467.

[3] Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis, "Understanding Civil War: A New Agenda," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 1 (February 1, 2002): 3–12, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002702046001001; Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, "Transnational Dimensions of Civil War," *Journal of Peace Research* 44, no. 3 (May 1, 2007): 293–309, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343307076637; Jeffrey T. Checkel, *Transnational Dynamics of Civil War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[4] James D. Fearon, "Civil War & the Current International System," *Daedalus* 146, no. 4 (October 1, 2017): 18–32, https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00456 See also the rest of the special issue of Daedalus that focused on civil wars in the international context.

[5] Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers in the Twenty-First Century: China's Rise and the Fate of America's Global Position," *International Security* 40, no. 3 (January 1, 2016): 7–53, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00225; Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shifrinson, "Partnership or Predation? How Rising States Contend with Declining Great Powers," *International Security* 45, no. 1 (July 1, 2020): 90–126, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00384; Ronald O'Rourke, "Renewed Great Power Competition: Implications for Defense - Issues for Congress" (Congressional Research Service, October 7, 2021), https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/AD1151928.

[6] Walter Russell Mead, "The Return of Geopolitics," *Foreign Affairs*, April 17, 2014, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2014-04-17/return-geopolitics; Angela Stent, "Russia and China: Axis of Revisionists?" (Washington, DC: Brookings, February 2020).

Europe and the increasing worry about a future war between the US and China over Taiwan, these concerns about the future of war and great power competition may not be unfounded. In both cases, however, the wars in question are fundamentally about the right of authority over a contested demographic constituency: Russia claims authority over a greater Eastern Slavic people, and China claims authority over a territory primarily made up of Mandarin-speaking Han Chinese. Conventional political science categorization would likely place both such conflicts in the interstate war category, leaning heavily on the distinct separation of de facto foreign governments fighting each other in each example. Such a categorization would fail to account for an overlapping set of identitarian elements that more readily map onto current understandings of civil conflict than of interstate conflict.

The current international order is built upon the two foundational norms of national sovereignty and self-determination, with nation states serving as the predominant governmental form for the units making up the contemporary international system.[7] While sovereignty is based on international legal grounds, with state governments serving as the representative actors creating the institutional relationships between one another, self-determination is based on collective identity, which is born out of a contestable dynamic of in-group and out-group identification.[8] Because many states exist within overlapping and variegated spheres of identity, revisionist great powers contesting the current international order may find more immediate purchase in justifying war using arguments about their rightful authority over territories

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[7] J. Samuel Barkin and Bruce Cronin, "The State and the Nation: Changing Norms and the Rules of Sovereignty in International Relations," *International Organization* 48, no. 1 (ed 1994): 107–30, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300000837; Andreas Wimmer and Yuval Feinstein, "The Rise of the Nation-State across the World, 1816 to 2001," *American Sociological Review* 75, no. 5 (October 1, 2010): 764–90, https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122410382639.
[8] Roland Paris, "The Right to Dominate: How Old Ideas About Sovereignty Pose New Challenges for World Order," *International Organization* 74, no. 3 (2020): 453–89, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818320000077.

containing constituencies they claim as their own. Wars between states resulting from these types of disagreements are likely to take on characteristics of both inter- and intrastate conflict. This could lead to longer, bloodier, and more destructive wars that are also more difficult to understand conceptually.

Considering these apprehensions about the future role of war in the international system, one might hope that conclusions drawn about wars within states might inform future work focusing on wars between states. In this article, I first identify the emergence of international society and the complex relationships it raises for the understanding of war in contemporary international relations theory, specifically noting the need to incorporate distinguishing features of collective identity alongside legality. I then look at recent work discussing the concept of civil war in a broader historical context, bringing in the conceptualization of identity and legality as identified by the Greek notion of *stasis* and the Roman notion of *bellum civile,* arguing that a more intuitive categorization of war can be achieved by intersecting the two. I provide a table illustrating this taxonomy and discuss the heuristic benefits of such a separation as well as the theoretical problem of the final category, social wars, which occur when there is *stasis*, but not *bellum civile*. Finally, I explore social wars in depth, describing their historical precedent, the current embodiment of such a conflict in the Russo-Ukrainian War, and the future of their presence in a globalizing international system. I argue that by distinguishing social wars from purely foreign wars, many of the underlying mechanisms of civil war are likely to help us better understand the conflict process of future wars between states centered around disagreements over identity rather than over legality.

War in the Emerging International Society

International society, as envisaged perhaps most saliently by the English School of international relations, can first be characterized along the Grotian tradition by the presence of legally equivalent states sharing a set of norms and values that enable them to interact with each other as members of a single community.[9] If the world today can be thought of as such a society of states, then wars between its constituents might similarly be thought of as primarily internal rather than external. In this context, a new concept of civil war could be re-imagined as referring to conflicts that take place within this international community: between states that are functionally equivalent to citizens co-existing within a domestic community.

Evolving alongside international society, the English School also distinctly conceives of a "world society," the foundation of which stems not from Grotian image of a society of states, but from the Kantian image of a society of individuals.[10] In this more individualistic and revolutionary conceptualization of international politics, all wars will eventually take the form of civil wars once humans across the world begin to see themselves as functionally equal under the pretense of a greater, universalist cosmopolitanism.[11] In this scenario, the domestic and international spheres functionally flatten onto each other, and the differences in legal distinction between individuals collapses.[12]

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[9] Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, 4. ed (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 34–44; Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society?: English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 6–7.

[10] Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 23–25; Buzan, *From International to World Society?*, 7–8.

[11] Daniele Archibugi, "Immanuel Kant, Cosmopolitan Law and Peace," *European Journal of International Relations* 1, no. 4 (December 1, 1995): 429–56, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066195001004002.

[12] For a recent work on this, see Thomas Linsenmaier, "World Society as Collective Identity: World Society, International Society, and Inclusion/Exclusion from Europe," *International Politics* 55, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 91–107, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-017-0066-4.

Neither of these images of international politics' future, however, can be explained by the expansion of legal authority alone. The emerging international system is becoming characterized not only by states that are more hierarchically ordered, but also by a confluence of global culture across the world that is slowly homogenizing individual differences between people.[13] Indeed, globalization in the information age seems to be bringing about an accelerated dissemination of the very same norms and values upon which international society has been founded.[14] If the speed of this norm dissemination overwhelms both the coordinating and superordinating power of multilateral institutions, however, then this could lead to a situation where sociocultural connections between individuals in different states begin to converge more rapidly than the institutional connections between the states themselves.[15] To put it in simpler terms: if global society is emerging quickly, then global politics needs to evolve alongside it.

Especially since the evolution of the international system after the Cold War, states have begun to experience more numerous multilateral relationships with one another that take on both anarchic and hierarchic elements. In *Theory of International Politics*, Kenneth Waltz describes certain political entities as "borderline cases," existing between his parsimonious delineation of anarchic and hierarchic societies.[16] Since the publication of *Theory*, international relations theorists have attempted to address the link between the domestic and the international and the nuance lost when the two types of systems are kept detached from each other. Some, like David

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[13] Broadly, see John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, 1st edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[14] See the edited volume, Timothy Dunne and Christian Reus-Smit, *The Globalization of International Society* (Oxford University Press, 2017) esp. chapter 2 and the conclusion.

[15] As an example of how changes in social ideas below the level of international society can subvert hierarchies, see John M. Hobson and J. C. Sharman, "The Enduring Place of Hierarchy in World Politics: Tracing the Social Logics of Hierarchy and Political Change," *European Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 1 (March 1, 2005): 63–98, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066105050137; Jack Donnelly, "Sovereign Inequalities and Hierarchy in Anarchy: American Power and International Society," *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 2 (June 1, 2006): 139–70, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066106064505.

[16] Kenneth Neal Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Reiss (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1979), 116.

Lake, have pointed out the hidden forms of hierarchy within the international system, while others, like Robert Jackson, have illustrated the inclusion of anarchy within state systems.[17] Broader theories aiming to bridge the gap between the two spheres, like Daniel Deudney's Republican Security Theory, have also become increasingly popular in recent years, but have failed to find major purchase in mainstream international relations theory.[18]

Building off Jack Donnelly's concept of "heterarchic" systems containing tangled hierarchies and Paul MacDonald's concept of "embedded authority," it seems that the international system is increasingly characterized not only by states coordinating with each other, but sub-state and non-state actors that might otherwise associate with one another beyond the legally established geopolitical order (principally, sovereign borders).[19] Intuitively, identity is likely to be an even more useful lens than legality for determining the origins and identifying the conflict mechanisms in these types of cross-border conflict. Donnelly argues that because this heterarchic international system contains both vertical and horizontal unit differentiation, there are now an increasing amount of such sub-state and non-state actors at various levels within the system competing against top-down subordination (stemming both from the government and from higher ordered units like international organizations), but that the most privileged actors are the least marginalized and the most capable of independent action (think, corporations,

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[17] David A. Lake, "Anarchy, Hierarchy, and the Variety of International Relations," *International Organization* 50, no. 1 (1996): 1–33, https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081830000165X; David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, Cornell Studies in Political Economy (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[18] Daniel H. Deudney, ed., *Bounding Power: Republican Security Theory from the Polis to the Global Village*, 3. printing, and 1. paperback printing (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); See also Barry Buzan and Richard Little, "Reconceptualizing Anarchy:: Structural Realism Meets World History," *European Journal of International Relations* 2, no. 4 (December 1, 1996): 403–38, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066196002004001.

[19] Jack Donnelly, "Rethinking Political Structures: From 'Ordering Principles' to 'Vertical Differentiation' – and Beyond," *International Theory* 1, no. 1 (March 2009): 49–86, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971909000037; Paul K. MacDonald, "Embedded Authority: A Relational Network Approach to Hierarchy in World Politics," *Review of International Studies* 44, no. 1 (January 2018): 128–50, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210517000213.

international criminal organizations, or, potentially, private military companies like the Wagner Group).[20] This is critical for understanding the role that wars may play in the future of an increasingly heterachic international system where the legal basis for sovereignty is beginning to become incongruous with the broader evolution of transnational identity.[21] As the emergence of international society continues to evolve alongside an ever-accelerating set of technological advancements, the distinguishing categorical features of war need to be reconceptualized within a similarly more nuanced framework capable of properly identifying the basis for conflicts between all groups within the international system, states included.

As a result, the legal delineation between civil and foreign wars may be insufficient to capture the new types of relationships emerging between individuals and states in the international system. Previous work focusing only on citizenship as a criterion for differentiating civil wars from foreign ones may not properly grasp the nuances of legality and identity in the modern world, and, as a result, broader implications about conflict in a globalizing international society remain compelling, but incomplete. The conclusions drawn from interstate wars in the international system of even the 19th and 20th centuries might soon be unsuitable for explaining the new dynamics of war in the 21st. To better help explain these dynamics, incorporating the Greek concept of *stasis* can help construct a more thorough description of the role that identity and in-group conflict plays in wars today. By re-integrating this Greek notion of factionalism, the conceptual understanding of internal versus external war broadens; conflict now doesn't

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[20] Donnelly, "Rethinking Political Structures," 78; As an example of the how powerful transnational organizations can transcend even peaceful borders, see Arie M. Kacowicz, Exequiel Lacovsky, and Daniel F. Wajner, "Peaceful Borders and Illicit Transnational Flows in the Americas," *Latin American Research Review* 55, no. 4 (December 22, 2020): 727–41, https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.755.

[21] Steven Vertovec, "Transnationalism and Identity," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 27, no. 4 (October 1, 2001): 573–82, https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830120090386; Michael Peter Smith and Matt Bakker, "Citizenship across Borders: The Political Transnationalism of El Migrante," in *Citizenship across Borders* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801461873.

necessarily need to be distinguished only by citizenship but can instead form around in-group vs out-group identity.

Stasis and *Bellum Civile*

David Armitage's recent work, *Civil Wars: A History in Ideas,* has helped spur on new discourse about civil wars and their place in a more connected, contemporary world.[22] Indeed, the book's final chapter centers almost entirely around the argument that civil wars might now be best seen as an international phenomenon – including the familiar claim that some wars in the contemporary period could be seen as "global civil wars" within a well-connected international society.[23] Armitage concludes by arguing that as the basis for applying the term "civil war" expands, so too will its definition become harder to pin down.[24] If, as he implies, this definitional nebulousness arises primarily from the effects of globalization, then it behooves international relations scholars to consider the implications of mapping civil war onto an increasingly interdependent international society. Given that *Civil Wars* is one of the few recent examples of an attempt at understanding civil war in a broader historical context, it serves as a good foundation for considering the greater problem of theorizing civil war in the field of international relations.

Armitage's efforts focus less on theoretically differentiating civil wars from foreign wars and more on explaining the history of the intellectual tradition that purportedly gave rise to the idea of civil wars as an identifiably unique phenomenon. He argues that civil war originated from the Roman juridical notion of *bellum civile*, a concept denoting a type of war between lawfully

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[22] David Armitage, *Civil Wars: A History in Ideas*, First edition (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017).
[23] Armitage, chap. 6.
[24] Armitage, 236–39.

recognized Roman citizens.[25] As such, this implies that civil war can be overtly differentiated from non-civil war by virtue of shared legal identification between the combatants. This definition of civil war, as described in a review of Armitage by Carsten Hjort Lange, might be thought of as "exclusive," as it privileges a frequently binary legal status, excluding potential conflicts from being placed under the definitional civil war umbrella by virtue of its combatants not sharing an obvious set of identical legal privileges stemming from a single government.[26]

Some have taken Armitage to task for under-emphasizing the earlier Greek concept of *stasis* (discord, factionalism, dissent) as a foundational element of civil war in western political thought. The basis for this criticism is that he oversimplifies the term's intellectual history by referring to it as an exclusive marker for a type of political factionalism that occurred within city-states, restricting it from overlapping with the Greek understanding of war between city-states, or *polemos*.[27] This reading of *stasis* supposes that the Romans purposefully constructed the concept of *bellum civile* to better explain the larger scale internal conflicts they began to experience during the late republican era; in doing so, they ostensibly believed that there was a meaningful difference between the *stasis* described by the Greeks and the wars tearing the Roman Republic apart.[28]

But the terms do not have to be read as mutually exclusive. *Stasis* and *bellum civile* can conceptually co-exist if *stasis* is defined as a war between "one's own" and *bellum civile* as a war between citizens.[29] The one refers to an intuitive notion, the other to a legal status. *Stasis*'

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[25] Armitage, 22–23.

[26] Carsten Hjort Lange, "Stasis and Bellum Civile: A Difference in Scale?," *Critical Analysis of Law* 4, no. 2 (November 30, 2017): 130–31, https://cal.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/cal/article/view/28855.

[27] Armitage, *Civil Wars*, 32; Mark Fisher, "Stasis, Conflict, and Change in Ancient Greek Political Thought" (2023), 6–7.

[28] Armitage, *Civil Wars*, 32–33.

[29] Fisher, "Stasis, Conflict, and Change in Ancient Greek Political Thought," 7.

complex definitional history makes the justification of its connection to such an inclusive

theoretical understanding of war more difficult, but there is nonetheless reason to believe that

both identity and legal status should be seen as different variables independently important for

categorizing wars and their types.[30]

   Although these Greeks almost certainly did not have a singularly reified sense of titular

homeland, a collective sense of "Greekness" did still seem to exist at least by the invasion of the

Persian king Xerxes in the fifth century.[31] In his *Histories*, Herodotus remarked that there were

four unique markers that overtly separated Greeks from non-Greeks: blood, language, religion,

and customs.[32] Critically, this perspective on Greek identity was built out of a negation of the

alternative in a moment of crisis: the in-group Greek only existed in contrast to the out-group

non-Greek, the barbarian invader whose difference in identity could be used to fundamentally

differentiate them as an "other."[33]

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[30] Previous work has similarly concluded that understanding identity is key to understanding the complexities of civil conflict. See, Stathis N. Kalyvas, "The Ontology of 'Political Violence': Action and Identity in Civil Wars," *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 3 (September 2003): 475–94, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592703000355; Elaine K Denny and Barbara F Walter, "Ethnicity and Civil War," *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no. 2 (March 1, 2014): 199–212, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343313512853; Nicholas Sambanis, Stergios Skaperdas, and William Wohlforth, "External Intervention, Identity, and Civil War," *Comparative Political Studies* 53, no. 14 (December 1, 2020): 2155–82, https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414020912279.

[31] Paul Cartledge, "'We Are All Greeks'? Ancient (Especially Herodotean) and Modern Contestations of Hellenism*," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 40, no. 1 (1995): 75–82, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-5370.1995.tb00465.x; for a more directly ethnographic discussion of Herodotus and the concept of Greek ethnicity, see Rosaria Vignolo Munson, "Herodotus and Ethnicity," in *A Companion to Ethnicity in the Ancient Mediterranean* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2014), 341–55, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118834312.ch23.

[32] Katerina Zacharia, "Herodotus' Four Markers of Greek Identity," in *Hellenisms: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity from Antiquity to Modernity*, by Katerina Zacharia (Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 15; Although Herodotus' four markers have commonly been regarded as the first notion of Greek identity, more recently some scholars have argued that the concept of a collective Greekness goes back even further. See Joseph Skinner, *The Invention of Greek Ethnography: From Homer to Herodotus*, Greeks Overseas (Oxford University Press, 2012), chap. 1.

[33] This is admittedly a complicated subject that has been written on by a variety of authors. For a longer discussion about the identity formation that occurred through the differentiation of Greeks and Persians, see M. I. Finley, "The Ancient Greeks and Their Nation: The Sociological Problem," *The British Journal of Sociology* 5, no. 3 (1954): 253–64, https://doi.org/10.2307/587071; for a critical analysis of Herodotus's representation of the Persians and its implications more broadly, see Rosario Vignolo Munson, "Who Are Herodotus' Persians?," *The Classical World* 102, no. 4 (2009): 457–70; for a discussion about the way that Herodotus conceptualize the "other" in relation to himself and to Greece more generally, see François Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the*

Thucydides was similarly aware of this difference when writing his history of the

Peloponnesian War. Building off a conceptualization of a greater Greek identity previously

described by Herodotus, he contrasted the war between Athens and Sparta with the previous

Greco-Persian Wars and lamented that the once allied Greeks had turned against each other.[34] In

doing this, he presents the war as an internal conflict within a greater conceptualization of

Greece while simultaneously recognizing that the two competing *poleis* maintained distinct

citizenship and competing spheres of political influence.[35] To Thucydides, *stasis* as factionalism

was not limited solely to political conflict within a city-state, but could in fact be extrapolated to

a broader sense of internal strife within a people – in this case, within a Greek society that had

just defended its lands against an invading force only a generation prior.[36]

By ignoring the identity-oriented interpretation of *stasis*, Armitage circumscribes his own

definition of civil conflict by limiting it solely to questions of legality. This becomes obviously

problematic when considering the book's later concern about the potential for global civil war.

Such a conflict might not be understood by *bellum civile* alone, and legality might be an

insufficient variable for meaningfully categorizing wars in a more modern international system

where borders are frequently transcended and collective identities overlap.[37] Since the end of the

Second World War, international legal authority has slowly expanded across the globe. Although

this hasn't resulted in a solidified sort of international citizenship, it does complicate what in the

Other in the Writing of History (University of California Press, 1988); Vernon L. Provencal, *Sophist Kings: Persians as Other in Herodotus*, Paperback edition, Bloomsbury Classical Studies Monographs (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); See also, Mary G. Dietz, "Between Polis and Empire: Aristotle's Politics," *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 2 (May 2012): 275–93, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055412000184.

[34] Zacharia, "Herodotus' Four Markers of Greek Identity"; Munson, "Who Are Herodotus' Persians?"

[35] Per Jansson, "Identity-Defining Practices in Thucydides': History of the Peloponnesian War," *European Journal of International Relations* 3, no. 2 (June 1, 1997): 147–65, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066197003002001; Jonathan J. Price, *Thucydides and Internal War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[36] A more thorough discussion of Thucydides attempt at creating an inter-Greek historical narrative, see Maria Fragoulaki, *Kinship in Thucydides: Intercommunal Ties and Historical Narrative* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

[37] *Identities, Borders, Orders: Rethinking International Relations Theory* (U of Minnesota Press, 2001), esp. chap. 5.

past had usually been a simpler legal binary – a person was either a citizen of a state, or they were not.[38] As supranational membership in institutions like the UN and the ICJ expands, becomes more entrenched, and begins to serve as the legal basis for the universal rights of all humans, the exclusive, legal-oriented definition of civil war becomes inherently nebulous, especially if states are to be thought of as actors themselves.[39] As a result, combining the two concepts may serve to underlie a more useful matrix for categorizing the types of wars found in the international system today.

Defining Wars by Identity and Citizenship

A two-by-two with identity (*stasis*) on one axis and legal status (*bellum civile*) on the other serves as a useful underlying framework for thinking about the different types of wars that occur in the international system. In figure 1, I present a four-part categorization of war based along these two axes. The four categories represent ideal-types, and their borders are permeable in both cases; the two axes should be thought of more as a range than as discrete sections. Conceptually, this means not all identities and not all legal systems can be universally comparable, and indeed this two-dimensional mapping might best be thought of in relative terms.[40] Identity evolves over time, and comparing two identities against each other will always bear intersubjective scrutiny.[41]

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[38] This is a simplification of a more complicated subject, but generally accurate for the argument stated here. See, Bryan S. Turner, "Outline of a Theory of Citizenship," *Sociology* 24, no. 2 (1990): 189–217; Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Reprint edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Eric C. Dahlin and Ann Hironaka, "Citizenship Beyond Borders: A Cross-National Study of Dual Citizenship*," *Sociological Inquiry* 78, no. 1 (2008): 54–73, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-682X.2008.00221.x.

[39] International legal scholars have also noted the distinct challenge of defining international citizenship alongside globalization, see Kim Rubenstein and Daniel Adler, "International Citizenship: The Future of Nationality in a Globalized World," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 7 (2000): 519; Peter J. Spiro, "A New International Law of Citizenship," *American Journal of International Law* 105, no. 4 (October 2011): 694–746, https://doi.org/10.5305/amerjintelaw.105.4.0694.

[40] Kalyvas, "The Ontology of 'Political Violence.'"

[41] See, for instance Jonathan Friedman, "The Past in the Future: History and the Politics of Identity," *American Anthropologist* 94, no. 4 (1992): 837–59; Alberto Melucci, "The Process of Collective Identity," in *Social Movements And Culture* (Routledge, 1996).

Similarly, the creation and evolution of international norms makes the notion of unconditional legal difference irrelevant – normative standards of relationship between major powers have constantly been in flux throughout history.[42] Although both identity and legality can be operationalized and quantified, it's probably better to think of this as part art and part science. While this typology represents a categorization at a theoretical level, it should provide a conceptual basis for meaningful differentiation between the four ideal-types, in effect allowing for the future grounding of research looking at more intricate aspects of individual wars.[43]

		Legality (*Bellum Civile*)	
		Internal	**External**
Identity (*Stasis*)	**Internal**	Civil Wars	Social Wars
	External	Sectarian Wars	Foreign Wars

Figure 1: Two-by-two comparison table defining the four rough categories of war delineated by the difference in identity and legality between the combatants.

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[42] Barkin and Cronin, "The State and the Nation"; Amitav Acharya, "How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism," *International Organization* 58, no. 02 (April 2004), https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818304582024; Diana Panke and Ulrich Petersohn, "Why International Norms Disappear Sometimes," *European Journal of International Relations* 18, no. 4 (December 1, 2012): 719–42, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066111407690.

[43] The call for this type of broad-cut theorizing about civil wars has been around for a long period of time. See, Stathis N. Kalyvas, "'New' and 'Old' Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?," *World Politics* 54, no. 1 (October 2001): 99–118, https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.2001.0022; See also, Checkel, *Transnational Dynamics of Civil War* esp. chapters 1, 8.

In the left column we see two distinctly defined versions of war where identical forms of legal citizenship exist on both sides. The top left corner redefines the term "civil war" to denote wars where both sides not only share similar legal status, but also share a similar identity. Restricting the term to wars where both sides share identity as well as legal citizenship status can be useful for several reasons. One of the most compelling stems from the intuition that the term has traditionally been used to describe not just conflicts that occur within a single state, but where the conflict is born out of disagreement over some non-identarian domestic issue.[44] The cause of armed conflict itself can be multifaceted (for instance, the Chinese Civil War was both about disputes between various power blocs as well as about the future constitutional ordering of the Chinese state) but should still be considered meaningfully analogous if the combatants do see themselves as similar in collective identity.[45]

By restricting "civil war" to refer to only those internal wars where both sides share identity, it becomes possible to create a more nuanced typology of domestic armed conflicts. If we use the term to describe any conflict that occurs within a single set of sovereign borders, regardless of the identity or legal status of the opposing factions, we risk conflating disputes between two parties that want to maintain the legal status quo with disputes where one or more party wants to overturn it.[46] The bottom left corner describes these second types of domestic conflicts where

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[44] This is a huge claim that runs counter to some of the literature on the subject today. That said, the conflation of ethnic and non-ethnic domestic conflicts presents a conceptual problem, especially when it comes to identifying and measuring civil wars. See, for instance, Nicholas Sambanis, "What Is Civil War?: Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 6 (December 1, 2004): 814–58, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002704269355; I believe there is good evidence that this separation is not only theoretically justifiable, but will allow future research to more effectively identify causal phenomena in the future. See, Nicholas Sambanis, "Do Ethnic and Nonethnic Civil Wars Have the Same Causes?: A Theoretical and Empirical Inquiry (Part 1)," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45, no. 3 (June 1, 2001): 259–82, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002701045003001.

[45] Edward L. Dreyer, *China at War 1901-1949* (Routledge, 2014) esp. chapter 8.

[46] The theoretical problem poses a concern to coding practices in civil war research within international relations. See, Nicholas Sambanis and Jonah Schulhofer-Wohl, "Sovereignty Rupture as a Central Concept in Quantitative

both sides share similar legal status, but don't share similar identities. These types of wars most normally describe disputes between a central government and a separatist group, but I broadly call the category "sectarian wars," as not all these wars necessitate an explicit goal of political separation.[47]

There are obvious heuristic benefits from distinguishing this category from "civil wars." For example, we can more explicitly distinguish between wars within a multiethnic system: the Russian Civil War and the Chechen Wars are now not necessarily stuck in the same nebulous category just because both occurred within one sovereign state.[48] The latter is unlikely to be cited as an intuitively obvious example of civil war, and yet a binary domestic/foreign categorization would place it alongside conflicts with no identarian angle whatsoever.[49]

This disaggregation also helps explain wars where the dynamics of citizenship and identity are in flux. Specifically, war can be a catalyst of identity separation: a war that started closer to the definition of civil war could by its end be closer to the definition of a sectarian war.[50] The American Revolution serves as an example of a war that in part solidified a separation of identity between the British and the American colonists.[51] So too, the American Civil War serves as an

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Measures of Civil War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63, no. 6 (July 1, 2019): 1542–78, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002719842657.

[47] For a more thorough discussion on this, see the edited volume, Don H. Doyle, *Secession as an International Phenomenon: From America's Civil War to Contemporary Separatist Movements* (University of Georgia Press, 2010) especially "Secession and Civil War" by David Armitage. For a more philosophical discussion about secession as a unique concept onto itself, see Allen E. Buchanan, *Secession: The Morality of Political Divorce from Fort Sumter to Lithuania and Quebec* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991).

[48] Aristidis Tsatsos, "Second Chechen War: Causes, Dynamics and Termination - A Civil War between Risk and Opportunity?," SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY, November 3, 2014), https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2518687.

[49] The Journal of Conflict Resolution published a 2009 special edition about the very problem of over aggregating civil wars. See, Lars-Erik Cederman and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, "Introduction to Special Issue on 'Disaggregating Civil War,'" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 4 (August 1, 2009): 487–95, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002709336454.

[50] Chaim Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars," *International Security* 20, no. 4 (April 1, 1996): 136–75, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.20.4.136.

[51] Dror Wahrman, "The English Problem of Identity in the American Revolution," *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 4 (2001): 1236–62, https://doi.org/10.2307/2692947.

example of a war that enflamed such a separation between Northerners and Southerners, but whose eventual conclusion prevented the most extreme outcome of Southern nationalism from being solidified by the crystalizing weight of Confederate independence and sovereign recognition.[52]

The right column attempts the same disaggregation as the left but uses identity as a distinguishing characteristic for wars fought between sovereign polities rather than within them. The bottom right corner, "foreign wars," represents as ideal a categorical type as "civil wars" does in the opposite corner and uses the same heuristic reasoning as before. The most distinct foreign wars take place between states that see themselves not only as fundamentally separate political entities, but as wholly dissimilar peoples. The Opium War between Great Britain and the Qing Dynasty represents a stark example of this, especially given that at the time there were few real international institutions that connected the two governments in any meaningful way.[53] As such, the British waged war on a government it saw as alien and a people it saw as almost incompatibly foreign.[54]

The logic behind separating out civil war from sectarian wars by isolating identity seems straightforward, as does the legal separation of foreign and domestic wars. As a result of this two-axis design, however, a fourth category emerges that has less theoretical precedent: that of wars between similar people, but dissimilar governments. This top right corner describes wars where neither side shares legal status, but where both share identity, and it is here where both the

[52] Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (LSU Press, 1989).

[53] Andrew Phillips, "Saving Civilization from Empire: Belligerency, Pacifism and the Two Faces of Civilization during the Second Opium War," *European Journal of International Relations* 18, no. 1 (March 1, 2012): 5–27, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066111416020.

[54] Song-Chuan Chen, *Merchants of War and Peace: British Knowledge of China in the Making of the Opium War* (Hong Kong University Press, 2017); Hao Gao, *Creating the Opium War: British Imperial Attitudes towards China, 1792-1840*, Studies in Imperialism (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2020).

ideal concepts of foreign and civil war seem inadequate to capture the nature of such a conflict. While the warring parties may share some degree of identity, the legal status of the entities involved means that they are not part of the same state and as such it is not a civil war in any legalistic, formal sense. Neither is it truly a foreign war, however, as the parties involved do share some meaningfully communal sense of unity, and because the conflict itself may not solely be about external interests. To address this gap in our terminology, I propose calling this category "social wars." The term acknowledges the sociocultural connections that exist between the parties involved while also recognizing that these wars are neither purely domestic nor foreign in nature. Instead, it identifies a murky and undertheorized middle ground where legal jurisdiction and territorial boundaries might not tell the war's whole story.

Social Wars as an Independent Category

I borrow the term social war from the Roman Social War of 91-87 BCE, which arose from a disconnect of collective identity and legal status between Rome and its Italic allies.[55] In the Roman Republic, socii (literally "allies") were autonomous communities peppering the Italian peninsula that were bound to Rome by treaty. They were not considered Roman citizens but rather shared a status known as Latin rights. This enabled them to conduct trade, own property, and intermarry with Roman citizens, but it did not otherwise convey the greater social privileges or political participation stemming from Roman citizenship proper.[56]

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[55] Emilio Gabba, "Rome and Italy: The Social War," in *The Cambridge Ancient History. 9. The Last Age of the Roman Republic, 146-43 B.C.*, 1994, 104–28.
[56] A. H. McDonald, "Rome and the Italian Confederation (200–186 B.C.)," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 34, no. 1–2 (November 1944): 11–33, https://doi.org/10.2307/296777; Henrik Mouritsen, "Italian Unification: A Study in Ancient and Modern Historiography," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies. Supplement*, no. 70 (1998): 5–22.

Roman identity evolved alongside Rome's political experiences and the changes its institutions underwent.[57] From the beginning of the republic, Rome maintained a militaristic disposition predicated upon an inexhaustible push for outward expansion.[58] It provided an extensive scope of collective identity that remained principally founded upon a sense of bounded citizenship patterned alongside a mythical and geographic connection to the city itself.[59] Unlike the Greeks, this did not involve identification along ethnic lines using markers based on exclusionary premises; instead, the process of sociopolitical integration and eventual romanization primarily involved a civic sense of duty born out of years of exposure to military service.[60] The early efficacy of the Roman politico-military system hinged upon this decentralized model of political co-optation that had been institutionalized over the course of their conquests.[61]

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[57] For a broad overview of Roman identity in the republican period, see Erich S. Gruen, *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome*, Cornell Studies in Classical Philology ; The Townsend Lectures, v. 52 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992); For an overview of the variety of identities in the Roman Empire, see the edited volume, Ray Laurence and Joanne Berry, *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire* (Routledge, 2001); as well as Janet Huskinson, ed., *Experiencing Rome: Culture, Identity and Power in the Roman Empire* (London, UK: Routledge in association with Open University Press, 2000).

[58] Walter Scheidel, *Escape from Rome: The Failure of Empire and the Road to Prosperity*, The Princeton Economic History of the Western World (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 57–58; Roman expansion in this period wasn't an identical experience everywhere. For a discussion regarding the problems of applying a singular model of Roman political character across the entire republic, see Fergus Millar, "The Political Character of the Classical Roman Republic, 200–151 B.C.*," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 74 (November 1984): 1–19, https://doi.org/10.2307/299003.

[59] Scheidel, *Escape from Rome*, 65–70; For a more in-depth discussion about identity in the Roman military, see Simon James, "The Community of Soldiers: A Major Identity and Centre of Power in the Roman Empire," *Theoretical Roman Archaeology Journal*, no. 1998 (April 16, 1999), https://doi.org/10.16995/TRAC1998_14_25.

[60] Henrik Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 99–104; For a more conceptual discussion about the process of romanization in the early period of expansion, see Thomas Blagg, Martin Millett, and Tom F. C. Blagg, eds., *The Early Roman Empire in the West*, Reprint (Oxford, UK: Oxbow Books, 2002), sec. I; Additionally, the process of becoming a Roman soldier frequently involved at least one trip to Rome, which for many would be the first and possibly only trip to the city they would experience. The effect this process of pilgrimage to the capital has on collective identity formation is similar to the one described by Anderson. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised edition (London, UK: Verso, 2016), chap. 4.

[61] Scheidel, *Escape from Rome*, 59–65; See also, Pat Southern, *The Roman Army: A Social and Institutional History* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007) esp. chap. 2.

Unlike the top-heavy model of agrarian societies illustrated by Ernest Gellner in *Nations and Nationalism*, Rome's centralizing institutions built a core apparatus around which citizen elites and citizen commoners could find mutual collective identity.[62] Operating along what Charles Tilly calls a "coercion-intensive" model, the Romans continually admitted newly conquered peoples into an accessible spoils system wherein contribution was expected to be given as provision of soldiers rather than of taxes.[63] These soldiers participated in new conquests, took part in new spoils, and settled in new lands – a process that would regularly repeat itself as expansion continued.[64] This worked so well in part because the Romans profited from (and contributed to) a highly militaristic peninsular culture that glorified warfare. The conquered could maintain their sense of collective honor because they were never subjected to an imposed system of extractive taxation; instead, they were brought into the fold of a growing process of inclusive conquest.[65]

The earliest socii were initially brought into the Roman sphere of influence through a series of treaties and alliances in the 4th and 3rd centuries BCE, as Rome sought to expand its territory and influence on the Italian peninsula.[66] Over time, they became more integrated into Roman

[62] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 10; Scheidel, *Escape from Rome*, 87.

[63] Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992*, Rev. pbk. ed, Studies in Social Discontinuity (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), 17–20, 30; Scheidel, *Escape from Rome*, 63–67.

[64] Scheidel, *Escape from Rome*, 68–74; John Patterson, "Military Organization and Social Change in the Later Roman Republic," in *War and Society in the Roman World*, by John Rich and Graham Shipley (Routledge, 2020), 92–112, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003071341-5.

[65] On the general history of the Roman military and sociopolitical experience described in this section, see Scheidel, *Escape from Rome*, chap. 2, esp. 59–69; and Jeremy Armstrong, *War and Society in Early Rome: From Warlords to Generals*, First paperback edition (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021) esp. chaps. 4-6; see also: Henrik Mouritsen, *Plebs and Politics in the Late Roman Republic* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic*; Paul Erdkamp, "War and State Formation in the Roman Republic," in *A Companion to the Roman Army* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2007), 96–113, https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470996577.ch7; For an overview of the Roman aspects of social power as related above, see Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), chap. 9.

[66] Millar, "The Political Character of the Classical Roman Republic, 200–151 B.C.*."

society and culture, adopting many aspects of Roman civilization, such as language, religion, and government. Despite this integral relationship to Rome, however, the socii were never fully assimilated into Roman society and were never permitted to legally enter the Roman commonwealth as equals.[67] Alongside this nebulous political autonomy, the socii were obligated to provide military support to Rome in times of war, where they played a crucial role in Rome's expansion and maintenance of power throughout the Mediterranean. As Roman expansion increased in scope, however, the socii had by necessity become increasingly integrated into a Roman-centered military organizational structure even though they were still restricted from legal citizenship.[68] The Romanization of the Italian peninsula had co-occurred with a surge in wealth among Roman citizens benefitting from imperial expansionism, resulting in resentment by the weaker socii and their eventual desire for legal parity.[69] These tensions finally boiled over in 91 BCE, when the socii formed a coalition and declared war on Rome.

The war ultimately resulted in the defeat of the socii through a combination of military force and political compromise; Rome, despite its military victories, recognized the grievances of the socii and, in 89 BCE, extended citizenship to all freeborn inhabitants of Italy. This compromise allowed Rome to maintain its political dominance over the peninsula while also addressing the concerns of its former allies, but it would come at a great cost, as social upheaval would soon follow and augur the eventual end of the Republic not long after.

The Social War is emblematic of *stasis* occurring between two culturally connected, but legally separated groups in a moment of convergence. In a modern context, so too can the Russo-

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[67] Fergus Millar, "Politics, Persuasion and the People before the Social War (150–90 B.C.)," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 76 (November 1986): 1–11, https://doi.org/10.2307/300362.
[68] Patterson, "Military Organization and Social Change in the Later Roman Republic."
[69] P. A. Brunt, "Italian Aims at the Time of the Social War," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 55 (November 1965): 90–109, https://doi.org/10.2307/297433.

Ukranian War of today be seen as an equal but opposite example of a war launched by a preponderant Russia against a weaker Ukraine during perceived period of identity divergence. In contrast to the Social War, the Russo-Ukraine War is characterized by a collective identity that is experiencing division and conflict rather than confluence and accretion.[70] Ukraine, which gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, has struggled to establish a cohesive national identity and overcome historical and cultural differences between its various regions.[71] These divisions have since been exploited by Russia, which has sought to maintain its influence in the area and has claimed not only the protection of ethnic Russians living in Eastern Ukraine, but also a legitimacy as protector of all Slavic civilization.[72] As a result, the current war is marked not just by competing claims to citizenship and identity, but to a greater concept of collective belonging.[73] Furthermore, it has been fought in a highly heterogeneous and intersubjective political and cultural context: Russia claims that the war is simply an internal conflict between East Slavs, while Ukraine emphasizes that its national identity is unique and separate from Russia and Russian culture.[74]

The role of shared identity in both the Social War and the Russia-Ukraine War highlights the power of cultural links in shaping conflict between governments legally separated who nonetheless raise competing claims about collective identity. In the case of the Social War, both

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[70] Valentina Feklyunina, "Soft Power and Identity: Russia, Ukraine and the 'Russian World(s),'" *European Journal of International Relations* 22, no. 4 (December 1, 2016): 773–96, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066115601200.

[71] Taras Kuzio, "National Identity in Independent Ukraine: An Identity in Transition," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 2, no. 4 (December 1, 1996): 582–608, https://doi.org/10.1080/13537119608428487.

[72] Nicolai N. Petro, "Understanding the Other Ukraine: Identity and Allegiance in Russophone Ukraine," SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY, March 1, 2015), https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2574762; Yitzhak M. Brudny and Evgeny Finkel, "Why Ukraine Is Not Russia: Hegemonic National Identity and Democracy in Russia and Ukraine," *East European Politics and Societies* 25, no. 4 (November 1, 2011): 813–33, https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325411401379.

[73] Andreas Kappeler, "Ukraine and Russia: Legacies of the Imperial Past and Competing Memories," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 5, no. 2 (July 1, 2014): 107–15, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euras.2014.05.005.

[74] Dominique Arel, "How Ukraine Has Become More Ukrainian," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 34, no. 2–3 (May 4, 2018): 186–89, https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2018.1445460.

sides had vested interest in seeing themselves either as fundamentally dissimilar (Rome wanted to restrict the benefits of citizenship) or as inherently similar (the socii believed that they were owed the benefits of their alliance with Rome). Although both sides saw themselves as part of a greater peninsular culture, the narcissism of small differences proved to be too powerful to overcome peacefully. In the Russo-Ukrainian War, a similar, but opposite process seems to be occurring. Russia has a vested interest in seeing the two identities as fundamentally similar (effectively arguing for the unity of a Russian-led greater Eastern Slavic culture and the right to control its own sphere of influence), whereas Ukraine's right to self-determination hinges upon an interpretation of Ukrainian and Russian culture as being fundamentally dissimilar.

The duality of the beliefs held by each side in the two wars highlights an important interacting variable: that of the perceived power differential between the two states. In the case of the Social War, the already preponderant Romans' prosperity was continuing to grow, and as a result there was material reward for the Roman in-group benefitting from this power growth to continually restrict membership. The weaker socii perceived that a cultural convergence was occurring, but that the legal reality failed to reflect the change in identity; as a result, they launched a war against a more powerful Rome to redress their perception of a disconnect between identity and legal status. In this case, waiting longer would have simply meant fighting a more powerful Rome for the already weaker socii.

Conversely, in the Russian-Ukraine War, a preponderant Russia has seen its capabilities precipitously wane over the last several decades, especially in comparison to its previous rival the United States and its growing, culturally heterogenous neighbor, the EU.[75] In reaction to this,

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[75] Iver B. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations* (Taylor & Francis, 2016).

Russian material interests instead benefit from the broadening of the scope of Russian identity to be more inclusive of its neighbors, not less. The 2014 pro-EU Euromaidan Revolution in Ukraine may have catalyzed Russian perception that a divergence between Russian and Ukrainian identity was rapidly occurring, and that if they didn't act soon, the legal realities that they contested would become solidified by a similarly independent identity to match it. As a result, Russia felt it necessary to launch a war against a materially weaker Ukraine despite the risks of overtly contesting the international norm of sovereignty. From the Russian perspective, a successful intervention would result in an outcome like the American Civil War, where the process of identity separation was halted, while an unsuccessful intervention would be like the American Revolution, where a victory for Ukraine would cement the process of identity divergence.

Within social wars there is almost certainly an underlying endogeneity between power and identity: states becoming more powerful are probably more likely to experience identity expansion and convergence, while states becoming less powerful are probably more likely to experience identity contraction and divergence.[76] Conversely, it is rarer for rising powers to experience identity contraction and divergence or falling powers to experience identity expansion and convergence (though this is not universally true, as illustrated by the PRC-Taiwan relationship described later). Accordingly, it is likely that the Roman and Russian cases above represent the two most common types of social wars: one where a rising power is forcibly

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[76] Admittedly, this is an ambitious statement to make and would likely require a whole other set of literature to justify. Part of my intuition here comes from work looking at the role hegemons play in controlling social, political, and cultural fields. See, Daniel Nexon and Iver B. Neumann, "Hegemonic-Order Theory: A Field-Theoretic Account," *European Journal of International Relations* 24, no. 3 (September 1, 2018): 662–86, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066117716524.

checked by allies whose identities it is subsuming, and one where a falling power lashes out at former constituents whose collective identities are beginning to break away.

It seems, then, that identity convergence and divergence are the defining features of social wars. This gives credence to the category's intuitive importance for understanding and anticipating war during periods where cross-border identities are in flux, like in the current international system. Correspondingly, this could be even more concerning if the legal organizing principles of international society fail to represent the changing identities of a modern, globalizing world.

Social Wars in a Heterarchical World

In the context of international society, I define transnational identity as referring to the shared beliefs, values, and practices that unite individuals and groups within and across state borders.[77] As globalization has enabled the spread of information and communication technologies, it has also facilitated the creation of similarly transnational networks of identity based on characteristics like religion, ethnicity, language, or culture.[78] Global wars, then, might be seen as not only as wars between two or more states within international society, but also wars between different transnational identities themselves.[79] As an example of a global civil war occurring within one sovereign area, the Syrian civil war can be seen as a conflict not only between the Syrian government and the opposition forces, but also between different transnational identities,

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[77] Patricia Clavin, "Defining Transnationalism," *Contemporary European History* 14, no. 4 (November 2005): 421–39, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777305002705; Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (Routledge, 2009).
[78] Kathryn Sikkink, "Transnational Politics, International Relations Theory, and Human Rights," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 31, no. 3 (September 1998): 517–23, https://doi.org/10.2307/420610; Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).
[79] Gleditsch, "Transnational Dimensions of Civil War."

such as Sunni and Shia Muslims or Arabs and Kurds.[80] Correspondingly, the Russo-Ukrainian

War can be simultaneously viewed as a foreign conflict between the sovereign Russian and

Ukrainian governments while at the same time being an inter-identity struggle between the

Russian and Ukrainian people.[81] So too, Putin and others within Russia have painted it quite

overtly as an intra-identity struggle within one greater Eastern Slavic people across political

sovereign political boundaries in a post-Soviet world.[82] This image corresponds with the

assertion by Putin that Russia is fighting a war not just with a recalcitrant breakaway subgroup of

Eastern Slavs, but with an intervening NATO and the West as well.[83]

The identitarian and civilizational portrayal of the Russo-Ukrainian War may serve as an

augur for things to come. The importance of sociocultural and identity links in the international

system has only become more relevant in recent years when reconsidering the context of future

great power conflict.[84] With the expansion of globalization, the similarities in culture and values

between states may be becoming more pronounced, creating a sense of interconnectedness that

transcends national borders.[85] Simultaneously, globalization also seems to be producing an

opposing phenomenon of reactionary identity particularism (most commonly, populist

nationalism) as communities across the world respond to the widespread effects of this

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[80] Nikolaos van Dam, *Destroying a Nation: The Civil War in Syria* (London, UK: I.B. Tauris, 2017); Fabrice Balanche, "Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 2018.

[81] Taras Kuzio, "Russia–Ukraine Crisis: The Blame Game, Geopolitics and National Identity," *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, no. 3 (March 16, 2018): 462–73, https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1443643.

[82] Mikhail Suslov, "Geographical Metanarratives in Russia and the European East: Contemporary Pan-Slavism," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 53, no. 5 (September 1, 2012): 575–95, https://doi.org/10.2747/1539-7216.53.5.575; Maria Snegovaya, Michael Kimmage, and Jade McGlynn, "Putin the Ideologue," *Foreign Affairs*, November 16, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/russian-federation/putin-ideologue.

[83] Mikhail Zygar, "Putin's New Story About the War in Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, November 10, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/putins-new-story-about-war-ukraine.

[84] Eugene Gholz, "Globalization, Systems Integration, and the Future of Great Power War," *Security Studies* 16, no. 4 (December 6, 2007): 615–36, https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410701740908.

[85] Mary Kaldor, "The Idea of Global Civil Society," *International Affairs* 79, no. 3 (May 1, 2003): 583–93, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.00324.

interconnectedness.[86] As these contending phenomena continue to battle with each other, new

wars that might once have been obviously placed in the foreign wars quadrant of the table above

might instead now be moving closer towards the social wars quadrant.[87]

The perceived differences between people residing in different parts of the world have been

reduced, and the lived experiences of individuals are becoming more alike because of these

shared social practices. The impact of the internet and social media here cannot be overstated;

they have elevated a level of correspondence that has given rise to a new set of shared interests,

values, and norms that may prove to be critical in shaping the course of future relationships and

conflicts.[88] Wars in the contemporary world, then, will likely be fought by people who lead

increasingly similar lives as compared to generations that fought each other in previous

centuries.[89] At the same time, however, the opposing, reactionary force of contemporary

particularism provides a worryingly powerful catalyst for the outbreak of conflict.[90] While global

[86] Johann P. Arnason, "Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity," *Theory, Culture and Society* 7, no. 2–3 (1990): 207–36, https://doi.org/10.1177/026327690007002013; Gal Ariely, "Globalization, Immigration and National Identity: How the Level of Globalization Affects the Relations between Nationalism, Constructive Patriotism and Attitudes toward Immigrants?," *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 15, no. 4 (July 2012): 539–57, https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430211430518.

[87] Stein Tønnesson, "A 'Global Civil War'?," *Security Dialogue* 33, no. 3 (2002): 389–91.

[88] Soraj Hongladarom, "Global Culture, Local Cultures and the Internet: The Thai Example," *AI & SOCIETY* 13, no. 4 (December 1, 1999): 389–401, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01205985; Charles Ess, *Culture, Technology, Communication: Towards an Intercultural Global Village* (State University of New York Press, 2001); Manuel Castells, "The Impact of the Internet on Society: A Global Perspective," 2014; Uğur Gündüz, "The Effect of Social Media on Identity Construction," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 8, no. 5 (September 1, 2017): 85–92, https://doi.org/10.1515/mjss-2017-0026.

[89] Dafna Lemish et al., "Global Culture in Practice: A Look at Children and Adolescents in Denmark, France and Israel," *European Journal of Communication* 13, no. 4 (December 1, 1998): 539–56, https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323198013004006; Zahra Sharifonnasabi, Fleura Bardhi, and Marius K. Luedicke, "How Globalization Affects Consumers: Insights from 30 Years of CCT Globalization Research," *Marketing Theory* 20, no. 3 (September 1, 2020): 273–98, https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593119887469.

[90] Rogers Brubaker, "Populism and Nationalism," *Nations and Nationalism* 26, no. 1 (2020): 44–66, https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12522; Sheri Berman, "The Causes of Populism in the West," *Annual Review of Political Science* 24, no. Volume 24, 2021 (May 11, 2021): 71–88, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041719-102503; Erin K Jenne, "Populism, Nationalism and Revisionist Foreign Policy," *International Affairs* 97, no. 2 (March 1, 2021): 323–43, https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaa230; Simon Bornschier et al., "How 'Us' and 'Them' Relates to Voting Behavior—Social Structure, Social Identities, and Electoral Choice," *Comparative Political Studies* 54, no. 12 (October 1, 2021): 2087–2122, https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414021997504.

society begins to become more similar, the remaining differences between groups will become more pronounced; as a result, the perception of these differences will receive disproportionate attention.[91] As the Roman case exemplifies, the narcissism of small differences may very well prove intractable even in the face of longer-term trends towards global convergence.[92] As such, future wars between states will be hard to understand purely in terms of either legal or sociocultural distinctions but must instead be understood in terms of the interplay between the two.

Consider, for instance, the potential for conflict between China and the United States. Unlike the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, which was characterized by stark ideological differences and a significant lack of cultural exchange, a conflict between the US and China would occur in a world with a much more agglomerated, transnational set of cultural connections.[93] Although the two states are legally distinct entities, if a conflict were to arise between the two, it would be characterized by a greater sense of shared interests than would have been the case even just a few decades ago.[94] As an example: social media use, once a joint

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[91] Erik Gartzke and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, "Identity and Conflict: Ties That Bind and Differences That Divide," *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 1 (March 2006): 53–87, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066106061330.

[92] Vamik D. Volkan, "The Narcissism of Minor Differences in the Psychological Gap between Opposing Nations," *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 6, no. 2 (January 1, 1986): 175–91, https://doi.org/10.1080/07351698609533626; Anton Blok, "The Narcissism of Minor Differences," *European Journal of Social Theory* 1, no. 1 (July 1, 1998): 33–56, https://doi.org/10.1177/136843198001001004; Agnieszka Golec de Zavala, "Collective Narcissism: Antecedents and Consequences of Exaggeration of the In-Group Image," in *Handbook of Trait Narcissism: Key Advances, Research Methods, and Controversies*, ed. Anthony D. Hermann, Amy B. Brunell, and Joshua D. Foster (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 79–88, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92171-6_8; John R. Patterson, "Contact, Co-Operation, and Conflict in Pre-Social War Italy," in *Processes of Integration and Identity Formation in the Roman Republic*, by Saskia T. Roselaar (Brill, 2012), 215–26, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004229600_014.

[93] Patrick Major and Rana Mitter, *Across the Blocs: Exploring Comparative Cold War Cultural and Social History* (Routledge, 2004); Henry A. Kissinger, "The Future of U.S.-Chinese Relations: Conflict Is a Choice, Not a Necessity," *Foreign Affairs* 91 (2012): 44; Aaron L. Friedberg, "The Future of U.S.-China Relations: Is Conflict Inevitable?," *International Security* 30, no. 2 (October 1, 2005): 7–45, https://doi.org/10.1162/016228805775124589; Jan Nederveen Pieterse Sociology Mellichamp Professor of Global Studies and, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).

[94] Yangzi Sima and Peter C. Pugsley, "The Rise of A 'Me Culture' in Postsocialist China: Youth, Individualism and Identity Creation in the Blogosphere," *International Communication Gazette* 72, no. 3 (April 2010): 287–306,

interest but separated experience between the US and China, has in recent years finally begun to occur across shared platforms.[95] In 2015, although 25% of all US social media users reportedly used LinkedIn, only about 1% of Chinese users reportedly similarly despite it representing the most widely used western social media platform in the country at the time.[96] In 2022, TikTok was reportedly used by 67% of all teenage social media users in the US and upwards of 75% of all users in China.[97]

Although it can be tempting to over-extrapolate from these numbers, it would also be myopic to downplay them as well. This rapid movement towards shared social media platforms doesn't necessarily imply that sociocultural homogeneity is imminent, but it does raise the question of how macro-identities might shift in the coming era if the current pattern of technological standardization holds true.[98] From an analytical standpoint, it will likely only become more difficult to claim that individuals will identify first and foremost as representatives of their sovereign nation in the event of conflict.[99] Instead, future recognition of the interplay between

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https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048509356952; Julie Anne Lee et al., "Schwartz Values Clusters in the United States and China," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 42, no. 2 (March 1, 2011): 234–52, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022110396867.

[95] As an example of work looking at how contemporary social media is now being designed with a global audience in mind, see Huatong Sun, *Global Social Media Design: Bridging Differences Across Cultures* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

[96] "In China, LinkedIn Must Beat Local Rivals, Win over 'loser' Workforce to Avoid Google Syndrome," *Reuters*, June 15, 2014, sec. Technology News, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-linkedin-china-idUKKBN0EQ16N20140615; "China Social Media Users Insights in 2015," China Internet Watch, October 14, 2015, https://www.chinainternetwatch.com/13844/china-social-media-users-insights-2015/; No Author, "The Demographics of Social Media Users," *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech* (blog), August 19, 2015, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2015/08/19/the-demographics-of-social-media-users/.

[97] Sara Atske, "Teens, Social Media and Technology 2022," *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech* (blog), August 10, 2022, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/08/10/teens-social-media-and-technology-2022/; "Guide to Most Popular Chinese Social Media (Update 2022)," September 12, 2022, https://marketingtochina.com/top-10-social-media-in-china-for-marketing/.

[98] W. Lance Bennett, "The Personalization of Politics: Political Identity, Social Media, and Changing Patterns of Participation," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 644, no. 1 (November 2012): 20–39, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716212451428.

[99] Sheila Croucher, *Globalization and Belonging: The Politics of Identity in a Changing World* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

citizenship and identity will require a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which these sociocultural connections shape the interactions between increasingly intertwined polities made up of citizens whose familiarity with each other has become largely unobstructed by political borders.[100] For some, it may very well be the case that they identify first with a transnational identity that includes members of both the US and China than with the either the exclusive US or Chinese national identities.[101]

Exacerbating the problem of a potential US-China war is the more direct issue of Taiwanese sociopolitical divergence. Since the end of the Chinese Civil War, and especially since the country's democratization, Taiwanese identity has begun to rapidly shift towards a unique nationalism independent from mainland China.[102] This cultural divergence represents a potential moment of crisis for the PRC not dissimilar from the one perceived by Russia regarding Ukraine in the wake of the Euromaidan. If, like Russia, the PRC believes that Taiwanese identity divergence is not only inevitable but represents a movement that will eventually overlap with a de facto legal situation they ardently contest, then Chinese decision-makers may end up justifying war as a necessary action to otherwise prevent an undesirable sociopolitical cleavage from occurring. So too like Russia, the PRC is likely to perceive and portray the war as closer to an internal, civil conflict rather than that of a foreign conflict. In this context, NATO and Western involvement would similarly be portrayed as an unnecessary intervention in an otherwise internal

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[100] See Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson, *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State* (London: Routledge, 2020), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003084815, esp. chap. 8.

[101] For a recent work on this topic with regards to Chinese students, see Ruining Jin and Xiao Wang, "'Somewhere I Belong?' A Study on Transnational Identity Shifts Caused by 'Double Stigmatization' among Chinese International Student Returnees during COVID-19 through the Lens of Mindsponge Mechanism," *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (October 18, 2022), https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1018843.

[102] Melissa J. Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese?: The Impact of Culture, Power, and Migration on Changing Identities* (University of California Press, 2004).

dispute. Taiwan, like Ukraine, may conversely portray the war as an international war between two independent powers, similarly highlighting the breaking of the legal norm of sovereignty.

The perception of short-, medium- and long-term power outlook also comes into play here. If, like Rome, the PRC believes that it is gradually becoming more powerful and will allow its in-group members to benefit from this power accretion, then perhaps war will be seen as unnecessarily costly. Conversely, if the PRC sees itself like Russia and believes that it is gradually becoming less powerful vis-à-vis Taiwan and the US, then it could be the case that preventing this cultural divergence is worth the cost of war. Recognizing which future world the PRC believes will come to pass is critical for understanding whether a social war could break out across the Taiwan Strait.

Conclusion

If the process of globalization occurs in parallel with political homogenization along the lines of Kantian cosmopolitan universalism, then perhaps all wars will eventually be civil wars. But if globalization occurs alongside a stable nation-state oriented international system, then all future interstate wars will begin to take on more characteristics of social wars than of foreign or civil wars. Recognizing this process before it becomes commonplace will be critical for leading international states, especially those with vested material and ideological interest in maintaining the current status quo of international order.

Social wars represent a type of war that has always existed but has up until this point never been identified as a differentiated category. By problematizing the narrower definition of civil war and integrating the identity of *stasis* with the legality of *bellum civile*, the theoretical space for social wars becomes salient. The examples of the Roman Social War and the Russian-

Ukrainian War highlight not only the underlying feature of cross-border identity as a unique, identifying element of social wars, but also call attention to the causal element of identity change and relative power. If we extrapolate from these two examples, it may well be the case that these moments of divergence and convergence represent dangerous moments where the declaration of war could be seen as a rational choice by either the preponderant party in the case of cultural divergence or by the weaker party in the case of cultural convergence.

Given the perceived trajectory of a globalizing international system trending towards sociocultural homogenization, this could be a concerning problem for the future of interstate war. If, all things being equal, weaker states prefer war when they believe that the system doesn't properly align with their broader sense of cultural convergence, then this means that a globalizing world could see increased occurrence of war if the international system doesn't similarly homogenize. Worryingly, if this cultural homogenization also represents a simultaneous, discordant breaking up of larger, cross-border cultures, then preponderant powers could similarly rationalize war as a necessary tool to prevent future identity separation in the wake of reactionary nationalism. This runs counter to the general optimism that the interconnectedness of liberal cosmopolitanism will inevitably result in a more peaceful world, and certainly indicates that the leading powers in the current Liberal International Order could be looking at a more dangerous future than they might otherwise anticipate.

If this conclusion is true, then it is paramount that we better understand social wars, as they will likely only become more common in the 21st century. Future research on the subject should look at establishing a broader, inclusive historical overview of cases that meet the inclusion criteria, especially if they represent alternative outcomes. Alongside this, identifying moments of cultural convergence and divergence will be important for future policymakers, as they could

represent catalyzing periods of potential crisis. If the world is to globalize peacefully, then it needs to find a way to overcome the obvious hurdle represented by social wars. In doing so, we must first recognize that they have both been a major category of war in the past and they will likely only become more prominent in the future.

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